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SUBJECT: UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY WORKING GROUP TO CONSIDER
ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

11. This is an action request. Please see paragraph 5.

12. Summary: On Friday, August 3, 2007, Ambassador Wallace delivered a strong statement at the meeting of the GA Ad Hoc Working Group on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA) (by UN staff or related personnel) in which he reaffirmed USG support for UN efforts to prevent and discipline incidents of SEA and stressed that "we must change the culture of impunity that allows such horrific acts to take place." (See paragraph 6.) The Chairman of the WG, the Ambassador of Costa Rica, the Special Representative of the SYG for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, A-SYG Lute, the Officer-in-Charge of the Department of Field Support (DFS), and other delegations also spoke. At the next meeting of the WG, on September 12, delegations will have the opportunity to deliver general statements on the draft policy statement and draft comprehensive strategy on assistance and support to victims of SEA contained in UN document A/60/877. The WG recommended that the substantive session of the WG should take place on December 3-7, 2007. End Summary.

13. The Ad-Hoc Working Group on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (by UN staff or related personnel) held a meeting on August 3, 2007. The WG is mandated to consider the draft UN policy statement and draft UN comprehensive strategy on assistance and support to victims of SEA by UN staff or related personnel. At the outset of the meeting, Jane Holl Lute, A-SYG and Officer-in-Charge of DFS, made an impassioned plea to troop contributing countries (TCCs) to identify with the peril that the victims find themselves in. Lute outlined the practical application of a victims assistance strategy, ranging from physical treatment to possible psycho-social counseling. She stressed that cost is not a barrier for this program to have success. While acknowledging that she understood the concerns expressed by certain TCCs regarding false allegations, she wished that "I heard the same concern for the victims."

14. In her statement, the Special Representative of the SYG for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, reviewed various elements of the draft strategy, noting that the costs are very low. She emphasized that the UN must live up to its ideals and said the Organization "cannot be remotely seen as being involved in this." Canada, on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, fully supported adoption of the strategy and recommended that delegations should make specific statements at its next meeting and submit comments in writing to facilitate negotiations. Portugal, on behalf of the EU, said the draft is a good basis for negotiations and said member state delegations should include human rights and legal experts. Pakistan, the only major TCC to address the WG, said it is clear that all members are committed to eradicating SEA and that there is a consensus that we should all work towards adoption of a strategy.

15. The WG recommended that the GA should formally decide that the WG will meet from 3 to 7 December 2007 and submit a

report on its work to the 62nd GA. Prior to adoption of the WG's recommendation, the Secretary of the WG said that it is anticipated that the additional conference servicing requirements of approximately \$296,000 to hold the December meeting can be accommodated to the extent possible within the resources already included in the current program budget. The Department's guidance is requested on the composition of our delegation to the December WG meeting, and also on the preparations for the September 12 meeting, informal consultations during the main part of the 62nd GA, and the substantive session of the WG from 3 to 7 December 2007.

16. Statement by Ambassador Wallace:

I thank the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica for Chairing this Working Group and for the presentation and remarks by Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict and Jane Holl Lute, Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Field Support.

Our work on a strategy to assist and support victims is important and we support such efforts strongly. It is only one part of the response required of us. We must provide victims the assistance and support they need. It is a larger and overriding imperative that we end the scourge of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers once and for all.

My delegation recognizes and appreciates the important work being carried by Conduct and Discipline Teams, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), and other UN personnel, both at Headquarters and in the field, to end sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers. Notwithstanding these efforts, including adoption of a zero tolerance policy and other standards of conduct, we must regretfully recognize

that egregious acts continue to occur - some two and a half years following issuance of Prince Zeid's report. As my delegation stated in the Security Council in February of last year, acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeepers against people they have been sent to protect constitute one of the greatest stains on the history of the UN. It is absolutely unacceptable that horrific crimes of sexual exploitation and abuse have been committed by UN peacekeepers against individuals they have been assigned to protect. Thankfully we are not alone in our outrage as other member states have expressed their grave concerns as well.

During that meeting, my delegation and other delegations emphasized the necessity of taking firm and decisive action. We say again that we must take action now not only to pursue justice and a resolution of crimes that have already been committed, but also to establish the necessary mechanisms, training and oversight procedures to ensure that they are not repeated in existing and future peacekeeping operations. We said then that we cannot wait months and years while more of the innocent and vulnerable are exploited and the reputation of UN peacekeepers continues to decline.

At that meeting, which took place almost a year and a half ago, my delegation said that as we begin to plan for our next operation, we do not want to revisit the tragedies of sexual exploitation and abuse and the headlines that UN peacekeepers are raping and abusing the very populations that they are entrusted to protect.

Despite all of the international community's well-intentioned efforts, we must face the fact that our best efforts are failing. Such illicit acts continue.

We must change the culture of impunity that allows such horrific acts to take place. As Under Secretary-General Guehenno has remarked, "we need to create a culture and environment in peacekeeping operations that does not permit sexual exploitation and abuse. This requires action by both DPKO and Member States."

We call on all member states in the UN system to strengthen their resolve to improve and fully implement all mechanisms currently in place to address all aspects of sexual exploitation and abuse. Most importantly, troop contributing countries (TCCs) must resolve to investigate and punish offenders. Unpunished offenders tarnish all of us, particularly those states that can act but fail to do so. My delegation notes that several TCCs have taken some form of disciplinary action against repatriated military personnel. Pre- and post-deployment training compliance, adequate living standards for troops, discipline, and command and control require vigilance, commitment and action by TCCs. Acts of sexual exploitation and abuse must be prevented from occurring. There must be real consequences to deter future acts.

The "boys will be boys" attitude which continues to pervade peacekeeping operations must be met with a true zero tolerance policy by all involved in the important work of UN peacekeeping.

The United States has committed to taking firm and decisive action in response to any acts of misconduct by our personnel while serving in UN peacekeeping operations. The U.S. Congress has also taken action to address this matter. In 2005, Congress passed and President Bush signed the 2005 reauthorization of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000. This legislation requires the executive branch to report annually to the U.S. Congress on the actions taken by the United Nations and other international organizations to prevent trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse by employees, contractors, and peacekeeping forces. It also requires the Secretary of State to report to the U.S. Congress on the effectiveness of these actions prior to voting on any new or reauthorized peacekeeping mission.

What cannot be lost in this discussion are the voices of the victims. Far too often we do not hear those voices. The victims of such acts must be heard. One horrific account portrayed in The New York Times is the following:

Bunia, Congo, Dec. 16, 2004

In the corner of the tent where she says a soldier forced himself on her, Helen, a frail fifth grader with big eyes and skinny legs, remembers seeing a blue helmet. The United Nations peacekeeper that tore off her clothes had used a cup of milk to lure her close, she said in a high-pitched voice, fidgeting as she spoke. It was her favorite drink, she said, but one her family could rarely afford. 'I was so happy,' she said. After she gulped it down, the foreign soldier pulled Helen, a 12-year-old, into bed, she said. About an hour later, he gave her a dollar, put a finger to his lips

and pushed her out of his tent, she said.

We must not forget the individual voices of the vulnerable and exploited. Let them hear from us loud and clear.

It is a moral and ethical imperative that we take action. Far too much time has passed. The voices of those exploited are growing weaker, and new voices of exploitation are being added to the chorus of outrages. We must all act not only as members of this body but as individual members states as well.

KHALILZAD